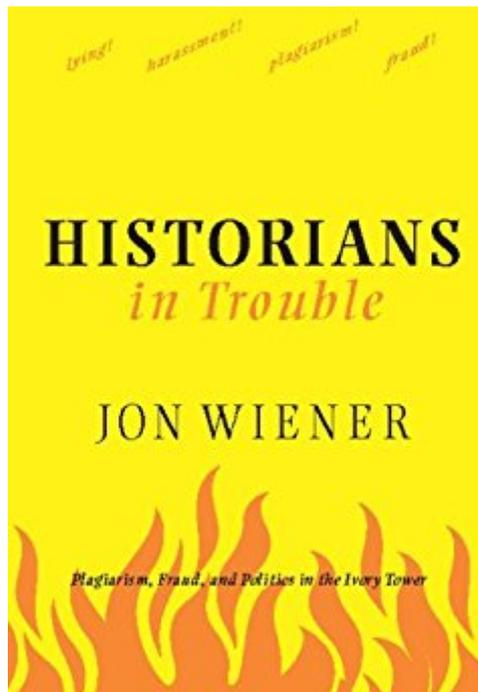


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Historians In Trouble: Plagiarism, Fraud, And Politics In The Ivory Tower



Synopsis

Historians in Trouble is investigative journalist and historian Jon Wiener's "incisive and entertaining" (New Statesman, UK) account of several of the most notorious history scandals of the last few years. Focusing on a dozen key controversies ranging across the political spectrum and representing a wide array of charges, Wiener seeks to understand why some cases make the headlines and end careers, while others do not. He looks at the well publicized cases of Michael Bellesiles, the historian of gun culture accused of research fraud; accused plagiarists and "celebrity historians" Stephen Ambrose and Doris Kearns Goodwin; Pulitzer Prize-winning Joseph J. Ellis, who lied in his classroom at Mount Holyoke about having fought in Vietnam; and the allegations of misconduct by Harvard's Stephan Thernstrom and Emory's Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, who nevertheless were appointed by George W. Bush to the National Council on the Humanities. As the Bancroft Prize-winning historian Linda Gordon wrote in Dissent, Wiener's "very readable book . . . reveal[s] not only scholarly misdeeds but also recent increases in threats to free debate and intellectual integrity."

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Customer Reviews

It seems, according to Wiener, that the most famous historians of all, Stephen Ambrose and Doris Kearns Goodwin, were actually the worst offenders. Goodwin, a former associate of Lyndon Johnson, used passages from another woman's book, a woman who had made a specialty of the life of Kathleen Kennedy (JFK's sister who died young and beautiful). When she has nabbed (by the other woman), instead of coiffessing all she made a secret pact with the author, telling her, keep this quiet and I will give you lots of money, and do whatever else you like. The cover-up was worse than the original offense! As far as Ambrose goes, well, poor guy was probably sick when he began his career of mass plagiarizing, but Wiener suggests that the sheer number of books he signed contracts to write left him with little time to do the research himself, so he just began copying books like crazy and ladling on whatever pages he needed, thinking no one would notice. However, FORBES magazine had his number and called him on it, whereupon he said he would write no more books. Death took him away from us, he who did so much for the "Greatest Generation." I hope his "D-Day Museum" in New Orleans is okay. It stood as a tribute to Ambrose's genius and, to a lesser degree, as a reminder that if you're famous enough, you can get away with things for which a lesser historian would have had his ass handed to him. You can see that happening again and again in Wiener's book.

I got this out of the library to see what it said about the Allen Weinstein and Perjury: The Hiss-Chambers Case. What it says isn't true. First, it slams Weinstein because he and his publisher paid for access to KGB files in the years immediately after the fall of the Soviet Union. "Historian" Weiner never mentions that was the only way to get access to said files. The proper scholarly procedure, it seems, is to wait till the Russian government collapses and it throws open all surviving files. The possibility that they will be destroyed before then is not mentioned. As a real historian wrote, "Perhaps this was not the best way to get hold of KGB operational files, but it is the only way there was." (Anne Applebaum in THE NEW REPUBLIC). Next, the faux historian goes on to demonstrate the simplest path to proving Alger Hiss's guilt: like every one of Hiss's defenders, he lies about the Hiss case. It is NOT true, e.g., that "the FBI, the Justice Department, and the House Un-American Activities Committee" believed Hiss's denials of being a Communist Party member. The FBI forced him from the State Dept. in 1946 because they believed said accusations, as well as accusations of espionage. This is thoroughly documented in PERJURY. Nor is it true he only accused Hiss of espionage after being sued for libel. He accused Hiss of espionage in 1939, in an interview with Adolf Berle, something else documented in PERJURY. Nor is it true that the 1949-'50 perjury trial came down to just Hiss's word vs. Chambers's. Under U.S. law, if that had been the

only evidence, Hiss would not have stood trial.

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